Release No.: NR 11-018 **For Release:** Feb. 24, 2011
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Corps of Engineers starts another Lake Okeechobee release to benefit Caloosahatchee Estuary

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District will continue water releases from Lake Okeechobee to the Caloosahatchee Estuary to help improve estuarine conditions, which have declined in recent months due to the lack of sufficient freshwater. A new water release starts tomorrow, Feb. 25.

The target flow of this release is an average of 300 cubic feet per second (cfs) over a seven-day period to the Caloosahatchee River measured at W.P. Franklin Lock and Dam (S-79). The Corps anticipates the total pulse release effect on the lake level to be about a sixth-of-an-inch off the lake. Today, the lake stage is 12.24 feet (NGVD).

The mixing of freshwater with seawater establishes salinity levels that are essential to Caloosahatchee's estuarine health, productivity and function. The release will provide much needed support to the natural system, while minimally impacting Lake Okeechobee's water level, scientists and water managers say.

Minimum freshwater releases to the Caloosahatchee River are critical to maintaining estuarine health and productivity. Freshwater tape grass, which provides important food and nursery habitat, is an indicator of conditions in the Caloosahatchee's upper estuary. Corps officials expect this week's low volume release to continue prolonging the benefit of lowered salinities, reducing additional impacts and degradation of the freshwater tape grass and other submerged aquatic vegetation.

The Corps strives to maintain the lake between 12.5 and 15.5 feet (NGVD) while balancing all competing demands. At 12.24 feet (NGVD), Lake Okeechobee's level is in the 2008 Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule's Beneficial Use Sub-Band, which varies seasonally between elevation 10.5 feet and 13 feet.

Within this sub-band, unless releases are required for navigation purposes, the Corps generally defers to the South Florida Water Management District's recommendation for water allocation to various users. Fish and wildlife enhancement and/or water supply deliveries for environmental needs may involve conducting an environmental

release from the lake through the SFWMD Adaptive Protocols for Lake Okeechobee Operations or other SFWMD authorities.

The Corps and partner agencies will continue to closely monitor and assess system conditions.

For more information on water level and flows data for Lake Okeechobee and the Central and Southern Florida Project, visit the Corps' water management page at http://www.saj.usace.army.mil/Divisions/Engineering/Branches/WaterResources/WaterMgt/index.htm.

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